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ABSTRACT

Content analysis was used to study the values evident in televised beer and wine commercials. Seventy-seven prime time commercials, 7.6% of a week's total, were analyzed along value dimensions adapted from Gallup's measure of popular social values. The intensity of each value was coded on a five-point scale. None of the commercials in the beer and wine category presented refutations of any of the 19 value dimensions in the Gallup measure, while 13 of the measured value dimensions were affirmed in the commercials. Having a sense of accomplishment and lasting contribution was the dimension rated highest by the Gallup respondents, and the value affirmed most often in the commercials. However, there was no relation between the rank order of values appearing most in the commercials and those rated most important by Gallup's respondents. The five dimensions not treated in the commercials tended to relate to religion, personal freedom, and strict morality. While some of the reasons for the absence of these dimensions may have to do with the type of product examined in the study, it does not seem likely that many commercials would attend to these value dimensions since commercials tend to affirm those values instrumental to a consumer society. However, since the values that commercials do emphasize are of considerable importance to the population, it is difficult to find support for the critics' position that advertising subverts traditional American values. (HTH)

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ABSTRACT

VALUES IN PRIME TIME ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE COMMERCIALS

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The purpose of this study was to examine the values evident in televised commercials. Wine and beer commercials aired during one week's prime time programming were selected for this preliminary analysis. Commercials were content analyzed along value dimensions adapted from Gallup's measures of popular social values. While most of the same values were evident in commercials, no relationship was found between the rank order of values appearing most in commercials and those rated most important by Gallup's respondents.

VALUES IN PRIME TIME ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE COMMERCIALS

Among the social criticisms of advertising is the allegation that advertising exerts a profound and coersive effect on social values. The charge is fairly common and is fundamental in the work of Williams[1], Ewen[2], and Potter[3]. The position is clearly exemplified by Lasch in the following quotation.

> The servant of the status quo, advertising has nevertheless identified itself with a sweeping change in values...that began in the early years of the twentieth century and has continued to the present.[4]

The argument, whether offered by social psychologists, historians or Marxist critics generally follows the line that advertising has been the tool used by industry to modify the fundamental values of American society which were based in an agrarian, production-oriented community. Advertising, it is argued, was the mechanism for reorienting the society toward consumption, thus, better matching the desires of the populace to the production capacity of industry. Empirical evidence for this charge is difficult to find. There are at least two important reasons.

First, social critics and historians tend to ground their arguments in inductive, logical and rhetorical forms of analysis rather than in empirical approaches: and, second, the concept of "values" is difficult to define meaningfully, let alone to measure or evaluate given the empirical tools of communications research and social science generally. Nevertheless, the relationship of advertising to values remains an important one for investigation. Concern for this problem lead to consideration of the tools available for the analysis of values in that most pervasive and emphatic of advertising's manifestations, the television commercial.

[1]Raymond Williams, "The Magic System," New Left Review, Vol. 4, (Jul-Aug) 1960, 27-32.

[2]Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.)

[3]David M. Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954.)

[4]Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism, (New York: Warner Books, 1979.) p. 139.

Problems of Value Measurement

The assessment of values in mass communications presents a two-fold problem. Ideally at least, a measurement instrument should be suited both to evaluation of communications content and to measurement of the value orientation of audience members. This capability would allow the assessment of values in commercials and the comparison of these values with those held by the audience. The comparison would help to illuminate the controversy as to advertising's social impact. Unfortunately, no such dual purpose tool is currently available.

Milton Rokeach[5], whose name is virtually synonomous with value measurement, has provided a widely used instrument for assessment of individual's personal values. Yet, the application of this instrument to value measurement of communications content has been problematic. Both Thornton[6] and Limburg[7] have encountered difficulties in applying the Rokeach Value Survey in this way.

In the field of speech communication, analysts of rhetoric have had considerable success in developing tools for value analysis of texts. Steele and Redding[8] have identified what they characterize as the basic value orientation of American culture through analysis of the work of social psychologists and social anthropologists. The

[5]Milton Rokeach, The Nature of Human Values, (Glencoe, Il: The Free Press: 1973.)

[6]Lee Richard Thornton, "A Correlation Study of the Relationship Between Human Values and Broadcast Television," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1976, Michigan State University.)

[7]Val Limburg, "Value Perception in TV Viewing by Young Adults", 1982 National Association of Broadcasters grant recipient. Conversation with author.

[8]Edward D. Steele and W. Charles Redding, "The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion," Western Speech, XXVI (Spring, 1962), 83-91.

usefulness of this formulation has been demonstrated by McGuckin in his analysis of Nixon's "Checkers Speech." The difficulties with it are that no explicit instrument has been developed, and that the value categories proposed by Steele and Redding, while useful for skilled analysts, are not applicable for self-report measures of audience values.

While there is scholarly criticism of commercial public opinion measurement, pollster George Gallup provides a reasonable middle ground. Gallup's[10] strategy in value measurement differs from those of Rokeach and Steele and Redding who approach the subject at a rather abstract level. Gallup measures values by presenting respondents with statements describing behaviors. Respondents record their level of agreement as to the importance of these acts. While the more academically oriented researchers have identified fundamental value precepts, or orientations, and while these are useful heuristically, they are terribly difficult to operationalize as measures of both content and audience.

Gallup's conception of values is useful for several reasons. In audience analysis, respondents can readily report their extent of agreement with specific actions. In media content analysis, coders can easily identify verbal and physcial actions without having to weigh each act as a possible manifestation of an abstract value concept in order to record it. Finally, Gallup's national value survey results provide norms for comparison between values found in media content and among audience subgroups.

[9]Henry E. McGuckin, Jr., "A Value Analysis of Richard Nixon's 1952 Campaign-Fund Speech," Southern Speech Journal, 33 (Summer, 1968), 259-269.

[10]"Intangibles Valued More than Belongings," The Gallup Report, No. 198, (March, 1982) 3-24.

Procedure

There is little guidance in the literature as to what constitutes a representative sample of commercials. A wide variety of sampling strategies have been employed depending on the purpose of the content analysis.[11] This study followed the suggestion of Gerbner, et al[12], who assert that one week's prime time programming is representative of a season's content. It was reasoned by extension that a week's commercials would also be representative of a season. Since the focus of the study was the collective experience of Americans nationally, local advertising was not examined. The resulting sample (prime time from three networks during the week of November 21-7, 1983) based on 63 hours of broadcast time proved quite large, for, even when local advertising was removed, 1015 commercials remained. In order to reduce this to a manageable number for preliminary analysis, a single product category was selected for examination: beer and wine. It was felt that commercials in this product category offered a somewhat larger chance of presenting controversial or unconventional values than other categories such as food products or household cleaners. If this assumption was correct, the sample would be biased toward confirmation of the critics' views.

[11]For example, Brown selected 521 print ads for his analysis of family behavior as depicted over 58 years. Bruce W. Brown, Images of Family Life in Magazine Advertising: 1920-1978. (New York: Praeger, 1981.) Pollay sampled 2000 print ads in his study of the values in print ads. Richard Pollay, "The Identification and Distribution of Values Manifest in Print Advertising 1900-1980," unpublished working paper, History of Advertising Archives, Vancouver, Canada, 1983. Resnik and Stern selected 378 commercials in a stratified sample for analysis of information content. Alan Resnik and Bruce Stern, "An Analysis of Information Content in Television Advertising," Journal of Marketing, January, 1977. 50-53.

[12]George Gerbner, "Violence in Television Drama: Trends and Symbolic Functions," in Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 1, Media Content and Control, Comstock and Rubinstein, (eds.) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972.) 167.

In total there were 77 beer and wine commercials, 7.6% of the week's total commercials. Of this total 45 were unduplicated, 30 for beer and 15 for wine. Table 1 shows the number of commercials for each brand.

Two coders were recruited from a graduate level research methods class to perform the content analysis. Gallup's values survey was reconstructed as a code sheet (the 13 value dimensions represented in commercials are listed in Table 2) and written instructions were provided to coders. Intent and procedures for the study were explained and a three hour practice coding session was held. Next day, coders commenced analysis of the beer and wine commercials. Checks of intercoder reliability resulted in average agreement of 97.4%. Intracoder reliability checks showed 93.3% agreement.

Findings and Discussion

One of the necessary modifications of the Gallup value measurement instrument was provision for recording the absence of values in commercials. In other words, Gallup's procedure required respondents to deal with each value dimension measured. Content analysis of the commercials required provision for the possibility of a value not being treated. Such cases were coded "not applicable."

In addition to the "not applicable" category, the intensity of each value presented was coded on a five point Likert-type scale. The extremes were labeled "strongly affirmed" and "strongly refuted," with the midpoint being a "balanced" presentation of the value.

One finding of this study was that no commercials in the beer and wine category presented refutations of any of the nineteen value dimensions Gallup suggested. There were no "balanced," that is,

combined positive and negative presentations of values either. This is hardly surprising in that the extremely short period (typically 30 seconds) provides little opportunity either to attack a basic value or to argue both sides of the question. While the length of time available may be part of the reason for this finding, common sense advertising stracegy no doubt plays a part as well. Simple pragmatic considerations make it more reasonable to structure a message in harmony with accepted values rather than attempting to change them.

Of Gallup's nineteen measured value dimensions, 13 were affirmed in the commercials. (See Table 2.) The five not treated by commercials tended to be spiritual and altruistic in nature relating to:

personal freedom
following God's will
helping people
strict morality
religious activities

While some of the reasons for their total absence may have to do with the type of product examined in this study, it does not seem likely that many commercials would attend to these value dimensions since, as I have argued elsewhere[13], commercials tend to affirm those values instrumental to a consumer society.

Since part of the reason for using Gallup's value measures was for the standard his report provided, an important aspect of the study was comparison of the value emphasis in commercials with values held important by the public. Spearman's rho analysis of the rank order correlation between commercial and public value importance yielded a coefficient of 0.16, showing minimal relationship.

Since Spearman showed no correlation, Kendall's tau was calculated with a resulting coefficient of 0.02, further confirming that there

[13]Charles Frazer, "Advertising and Social Values," paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, East Lansing, MI, Aug., 1981.

was no relationship between the value rankings, either positive or negative.

While the relative emphasis given to values in commercials does not match their relative importance as measured in Gallup's national rating, it is important to note that the values commercials emphasize are of considerable importance to the population. Because of this it is difficult to find support for the critics position that advertising subverts traditional American values. Though the charge might be made that advertising, by not matching the popular ranking, exerts influence toward the reordering of values, it seems unlikely that any expressive cultural form (for instance, entertainment programming or popular literature) offers a direct match as to value order or import.

It is difficult to imagine that the severest critic would find fault in the emphasis commercials give to "having a sense of accomplishment and lasting contribution" yet, to the extent commercials as a whole emphasize personal benefits as seen in the five most prominently emphasized dimensions, and neglect the more altruistic value dimensions noted on page 6, there may be cause for concern. Largely, however, this study indicates that the value debate must proceed around questions of relative emphasis rather than questions of dramatic influence and reorganization.

This study is, of course, preliminary in nature. It is an investigation of a relatively small number of commercials in a single, and perhaps not typical, product category. Furthermore, the measurement instrument must be considered rather blunt. There may be important value dimensions which have not been measured which may allow more telling conclusions as to the relationship of commercials

and popular values. The study does indicate that empirical investigation of value emphasis is possible and potentially instructive. Perhaps at some future point it will be possible to make comparisons of values evident in commercials over time. This would allow more exacting assessment of the critics charges of advertising's instrumentality in the creation of a consumer society. But, for the moment at least, there seems to be no empirical grounding for the worst fears of the critics.

TABLE 1

FREQUENCIES OF COMMERCIALS BY PRODUCT CATEGORY AND BRAND

Product Category: BEER

Brand Name	Number of Commercials	Number of Unduplicated Commercials
Coors Total	11	7
Premium	6	4
Light	5	3
Miller Total	16	9
Premium	9	4
Lite	7	5
Michelob Total	5	3
Premium	2	2
Light	3	1
Budweiser Total	5	5
Premium	3	3
Light	2	2
Schlitz		
Premium	4	2
Jacob Best		
Premium Light	4	3
Heilman		
Old Style Premium	1	1
Total Beer:	46	30

Product Category: WINE

Taylor California Cellars	5	1
Andre Champagne	6	1
E & J Gallo	4	1
Reunite	3	2
Almaden	2	1
Paul Masson	2	1
Carlo Rossi	2	1
Giumarra	2	2
Martin & Rossi	2	2
Bolla	1	1
Inglenook	1	1
Colony Classics	1	1
Total Wine:	31	15

Total Beer and Wine Commercials: 77

TABLE 2

COMPARATIVE RANK ORDER OF VALUES BASED ON AFFIRMATION IN COMMERCIALS AND POPULAR RATING

Commercial Affirmation[1]	Value Dimension	Popular Rating[2]
37.7	Having a Sense of Accomplishment and Lasting Contribution	63
35.1	Having Enough Leisure Time	36
32.5	Personal Happiness, Satisfaction	77
29.9	Having Many Friends	54
26	Having a Nice Home, Car or Other Belongings	39
19.5	Good Physical Health	81
19.5	Good Self-Image, Self-Respect	79
18.2	Social Recognition	22
14.3	Having an Exciting, Stimulating Life	51
10.4	Having a High Income	37
7.8	Living Up to Your Full Potential	71
2.6	Good Family Life	83
1.3	Having an Interesting and Enjoyable Job	69

[1]The figure in this column is the percentage of commercials which "affirmed" or "strongly affirmed" this value.

[2]The figure in this column is the percentage of Gallup's national sample giving this value the two top (most important) positions on a ten point scale.